

PROTECTION AND
ADVOCACY FOR
PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES, INC.

The Protection & Advocacy System for South Carolina

January 10, 2012

Hon. G. Murrell Smith, Jr.
420B Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29201

Re: South Carolina Commission for the Blind Budget

Dear Chairman Smith:

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities, Inc. (P&A) is the state and federally designated advocacy organization for South Carolinians with disabilities. P&A represents individuals with disabilities, including people who are blind or have visual disabilities, in matters such as employment discrimination, obtaining reasonable accommodations to benefit from public and private services, and special education.

P&A requests that the Committee consider whether continued funding of two separate agencies—the Commission for the Blind (SCCB) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD)—is the best use of the State's resources. In 2011 the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which provides federal funds to the two agencies, reviewed the performance of the SCCB and SCVRD, as well as the federally-funded independent living centers, *Fiscal Year 2010 Monitoring Report on the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Programs in South Carolina*. <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/rehab/107-reports/2010/sc.pdf>. Throughout the report RSA raised questions about both agencies' service delivery models and methods of administration.

While the report identified significant problems with both agencies, the RSA's assessment of SCCB was blunt: "SCCB does not provide an array of VR services that meet the needs of all blind and visually impaired consumers and is ineffective in delivering the services it does provide." (page 34).

Specifically, SCCB, "[U]ses an internal system to deliver services that is insufficiently staffed in critical areas to administer the program and to provide its services, does not provide an array of services to serve all blind and visually impaired consumers with an employment objective, and is inefficient in providing access to offered services." (page 47). Conversely, RSA found that SCVRD does not collaborate with SCCB to co-serve eligible individuals with multiple disabilities, including those who are blind and visually impaired, thereby limiting consumer choice and access to services (pages 7, 22).

CENTRAL OFFICE
SUITE 208
3710 LANDMARK DRIVE
COLUMBIA, SC 29204
(803) 782-0639
(Voice and TTY)
FAX (803) 790-1946

PIEDMONT OFFICE
SUITE 106
545 N. Pleasantburg Drive
GREENVILLE, SC 29607
(864) 235-0273
1-800-758-5212
(Voice and TTY)
FAX (864) 233-7962

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL
Toll Free:
1-866-275-7273
(Voice)
1-866-232-4525
(TTY)
Email:
info@protectionandadvocacy-sc.org

PEE DEE OFFICE
2137 B HOFFMEYER ROAD
FLORENCE, SC 29501
(843) 662-0752
1-800-868-0752
(Voice and TTY)
FAX (843) 662-0786

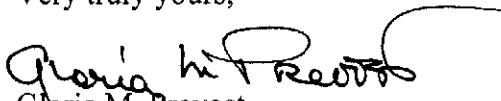
LOW COUNTRY OFFICE
1569 SAM RITTENBERG BLVD.
CHARLESTON, SC 29407
(843) 763-8571
1-800-743-2553
(Voice and TTY)
FAX (843) 571-0880

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The RSA report confirms what P&A clients have encountered: a fragmented system that presents barriers to developing their work skills so that they can be productive citizens. While the State is beginning to recover from the worst of the recession, there is an ongoing need to determine whether current methods of delivering of services work most efficiently. P&A urges the committee to consider whether the state needs two separate agencies, with their associated administrative costs, to serve individuals with disabilities who want to develop the skills to succeed in competitive employment.

Please contact me at 803 217-6713 or prevost@pandasc.org if I may provide you with any additional information.

Very truly yours,


Gloria M. Prevost
Executive Director

cc: Timothy M. Rogers